

Cirrhosis

Cirrhosis is defined as the destruction of the architecture of the liver by extensive scarring. The causes of cirrhosis are many but common causes include, alcohol, hepatitis C, hepatitis B, fatty liver, and rarely autoimmune liver disease. In autoimmune liver disease (autoimmune hepatitis or primary biliary cirrhosis) the body produces antibodies that act to destroy liver tissue or small bile ducts. These antibodies are usually detectable in the blood stream.

Cirrhosis is usually diagnosed on the basis of a liver biopsy but occasionally the liver may appear shrunken or bumpy (nodular) on CT or ultrasound scan which raises the suspicion of cirrhosis. Usually cirrhosis is seen on CT scan as a lumpy or bumpy liver. These bumps or nodules are an attempt by the liver to regenerate.

All cases of suspected cirrhosis should be further investigated. It was previously thought that cirrhosis was irreversible but evidence is now emerging that with treatment of some of the causes of cirrhosis can help reverse the scarring.

The investigation of cirrhosis usually involves several blood tests looking for viruses or antibodies that may indicate the underlying cause of the disease. Following this, a Hepatologist or radiologist may carry out a liver biopsy to confirm the cirrhosis. Treatment depends on the cause. Careful follow up is required to look for evidence of the development of a liver tumor, the risk of which is approximately 1-2% per year.